

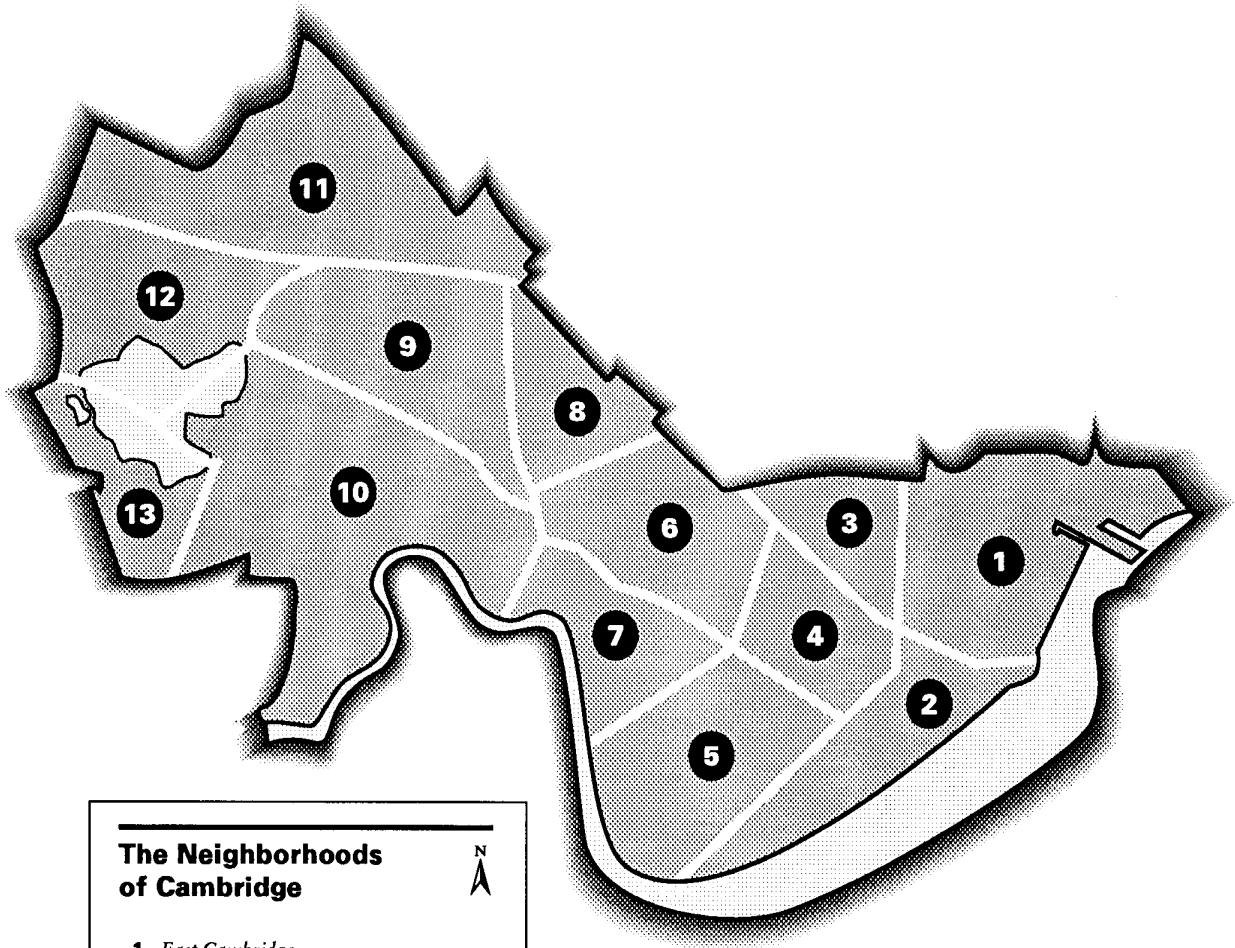
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## **Part I.**

### **Perspectives**

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*To create a vision for the future of Cambridge, it is important first to understand the history and context of the community's land use and planning decisions. That understanding gives a perspective on the choices the city has made and the issues facing Cambridge today. It allows us to create a vision for the city's future and enables us to consider carefully the policy choices and trade-offs that will help the city achieve that vision.*



### **The Neighborhoods of Cambridge**



1. *East Cambridge*
2. *MIT*
3. *Wellington Harrington*
4. *Neighborhood Four*
5. *Cambridgeport*
6. *Mid-Cambridge*
7. *Riverside*
8. *Agassiz*
9. *Neighborhood Nine*
10. *Neighborhood Ten*
11. *North Cambridge*
12. *Cambridge Highlands*
13. *Strawberry Hill*

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## 1. Cambridge in Context

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Cambridge, Massachusetts is home to 95,802 persons tightly packed into 6.3 square miles. (In the last Census, only five cities over 75,000 in population were denser.) Its density affords residents a rich social and architectural mix, which finds thriving commercial centers cheek by jowl with village-like residential districts.

The streetscape and urban pattern of Cambridge have evolved from three and a half centuries of development, starting with the 1630 settlement of Newtowne in present day Harvard Square as the colonial seat of government and learning. Industrial hubs and villages would subsequently grow up around Cambridgeport, East Cambridge, and later, the clay pits and stockyards of North Cambridge and Alewife. The tight weave of roads and "village" form is at times an uneasy fit with modern city activities, such as automobile travel and office-based enterprises. The mix of old and new, of tradition and change continues to give Cambridge its unique stamp and also presents hard choices as the city faces the final decade of this century.

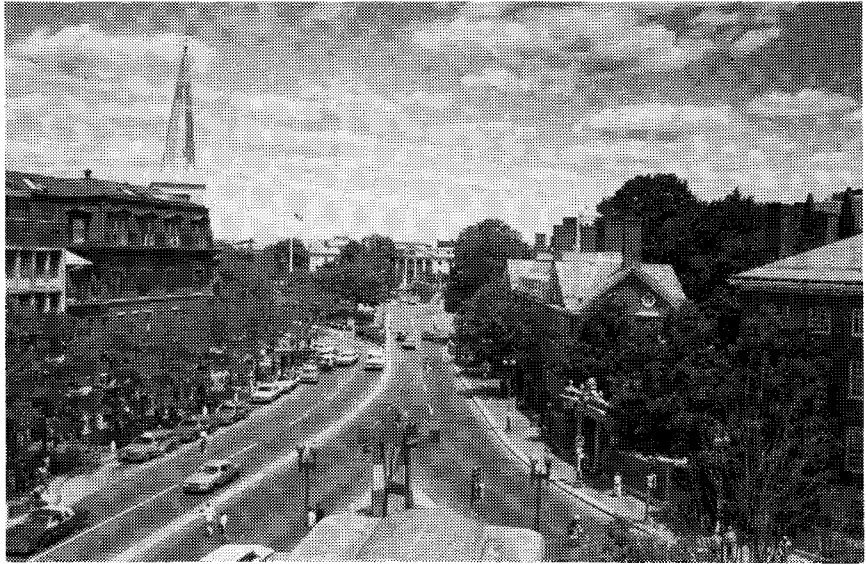
Cambridge is in actuality many communities: within its boundaries, it contains a multitude of architectures, neighborhoods, ethnic and social groups, and political persuasions. Most importantly, it is perceived and experienced differently by its diverse inhabitants. There is the Cambridge of Harvard Square's academics and professionals, and another lived in by police and fire fighters who dwell nearby in North Cambridge triple deckers. Still another is inhabited by immigrants and others of modest means blocks away in the Rindge Towers, or by homeless men and women along Massachusetts Avenue. This diversity helps attract people to cities. A city's well-being depends on a common experience, a shared commitment to dwelling in a place and making it better .

Cambridge's contrasts have sharpened over time. Over half of its residents over 25 have earned college or advanced degrees, yet one in six have not finished high school, and over one in five high school students drop out in a four year period. The city contains a higher proportion of professionals than the Boston metropolitan area, but it also contains a greater percentage of children in poverty. As the economic base has retooled from making footwear and furniture to software and pharmaceuticals, many remain left out, lacking sufficient skills and education to prosper.

Where one out of three residents could count on goods production (factory and construction work) to make a living in 1950, slightly more than one in ten are so employed today. Education, health and other professional services employ the greatest share of Cambridge residents.

The city's diversity is also a source of cultural richness and vitality. More than one in five Cambridge residents is foreign born. Students from 64 nationalities attend the public schools. Their families speak 46 different languages. An out-of-town visitor might be treated to a Greek festival or a Caribbean gala on the same weekend. On any morning the scents of Portuguese bakeries and fish markets greet pedestrians along Cambridge Street. Over 28% of all residents identify themselves as non-White or Hispanic, compared to five percent in 1950. The fastest growing minority, Asians, nearly tripled their share of the population in the past decade.

*Cambridge is a city of contrasts, as shown by these views of Harvard Square and the three Rindge Towers in Alewife.*



Other demographic trends point to Cambridge's unique character, as well as to patterns occurring nationwide. One quarter of the population is enrolled in college. In a five year period, over one-third of the population turns over. Fewer Cambridge households contain children. In 1950, one in four residents were under age 18, while in 1990, just one in seven were under 18. Today, under 8,000 households, or 20%, include children; more than twice that number are occupied by single people living alone. Children under four have made something of a comeback in the past decade, however. While family and individual incomes have been rising, even after inflation, one in three single mothers with children under 18 lives in poverty - a figure that has changed little in decades.

In comparison to many other communities, Cambridge benefits from a high degree of participation by its residents in a wide range of civic affairs. Each neighborhood has its own political and civic organizations, and few changes in the built environment occur without some form of organized comment or intervention. People care passionately about the quality of the social and physical environment - and disagree at times with equal passion. There is a sense of civic duty which results in a responsive local government. People do not simply criticize; they act to influence the outcome of decisions that affect their lives.

Cambridge blends tradition and change in equal parts, sometimes in the same building or institution. Nearly as old as the city itself, Harvard University and its academic community bring both the solidity of tradition and the flux of new ideas and inventions. MIT straddles this divide, as well. High technology firms spun off by MIT and Harvard occupy the former factory buildings which speak to a vanished tradition of manufacturing prominence. (Cambridge was once the Commonwealth's second largest industrial center.) These renovated buildings, such as One Kendall Square, formerly the Boston Woven Hose factory, illustrate the city's newfound prominence in cutting edge industries such as biotechnology, computer software and optics. They also point to the continuity of knowledge linking Cambridge past and present.



*This attractively landscaped plaza which is the focus for ground floor retail at One Kendall Square was carved out of the complex of industrial buildings which made up the Boston Woven Hose factory.*

The city's housing stock is a blend of old and new as well. Residential building styles range from the Tory-era mansions of Brattle Street to the modern brick apartment high rises along Harvard Street. Turn of the century two and three-decker apartments and similar wood-framed dwellings are a feature of many neighborhoods. Single-family houses on larger lots predominate in much of West Cambridge while multi-family structures are more common in the city's denser northern and eastern sections. High demand for this stock and the city's appeal to an increasingly professional, higher income population drove up home prices and rents in the past decade. While an unusually large subset of the stock is protected from the market by subsidies or rent control, most units which enter the market are either unaffordable or inaccessible to the majority of potential home buyers and renters, especially low- or moderate-income families. Cambridge remains a city of renters (30% of households are owner-occupied, compared to 60% of all units countywide), though homeownership increased by one-third in the past decade, due mainly to construction and conversion of condominiums. This was the largest jump in ownership in 40 years.





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ities such as Cambridge are unique laboratories of social and technical innovation. Inc. magazine recently dubbed East Cambridge "the most entrepreneurial place on Earth," in part because over 17,000 jobs were created here during the last ten to fifteen years. Cambridge is an engine of innovation not simply because of its great institutions, but because of its ability to bring people together to exchange ideas and make things happen. This is an attribute of all great cities, but special care must be taken to preserve and build on those amenities and public spaces which make Cambridge a good place for collegiality and conversation. The balance of tradition and innovation is a fragile but vital one.